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# Living small — Some Utahns discovering the charm of cottages

By **Susan Whitney**

Deseret Morning News

Cottages are all the rage lately. Take Washington state. On the islands and in the suburbs around Seattle you can find new "pocket neighborhoods," each with 10 or 12 cottages clustered around a common green space.

The cottages are colorful and stylish. Outside, porches and flower boxes woo the eye. Inside, an expanse of hardwood and high ceilings create an illusion of spaciousness. The homes themselves are actually only 900 square feet. Some are 1,000.

In Umatilla, Fla., a new neighborhood of cottages is being built on the wooded grounds of an old estate near the center of town. The developer hopes to find 16 buyers who want to live in a smaller than-average home, close to nature and nightlife.

Utahns have been living small for years, notes Bernell Loveridge, program manager with the Utah Energy Office. In towns from Providence to St. George, it's easy to spot a tiny Tudor or a small farmhouse. After WWII, entire subdivisions of small homes sprang up in larger cities.

Salt Lake's Rose Park was one. Christeele Acres in Orem was another. It was built for steel workers and was recently put on the National Register of Historic Places, says Kirk Huffaker, assistant director of the Utah Heritage Foundation. Huffaker himself lives in a 1,000-square-foot home in Sugar House. He likes little. He mentions the houses that line the hidden courts in downtown Salt Lake. These "sidewalk streets" are so underappreciated, he says.

Unlike the new cottages, which are designed for singles or couples, Rose Park and Christeele Acres were intended for families, Loveridge notes. "It used to be it was OK for all the kids to be in one bedroom."

And if there are plenty of small historic Utah homes, there are also new small houses — and condos and town houses. Small homes are popular, says Dave McArthur, president of the Utah Homebuilders Association. McArthur says we fool ourselves if we think this is a state of large, detached houses.



Coho Cottage in Washington state is 965 square feet. It is part of the Greenwood Avenue Cottages.

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The Coho Cottage has a cozy eating area to suit its floor plan.

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The people who buy small homes may be empty nesters or two-parent families, he says. "Or single moms, single dads, people with roommates, young people who understand that owning a home is a good investment . . ." McArthur says not every Utahn wants three bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths on a quarter acre.

For Erick and Shelly Shosted, it is all about being cozy. They originally owned a house with two bathrooms, but when Erick's grandmother died, they couldn't wait to sell that place and

buy her one-bathroom home in Copperton.

The neighborhood feels like a neighborhood should feel, explains Shelly. And since they added insulation and energy-efficient windows, the all-brick house is actually as snug as it looks.

Counting the basement, the home is 1,800 square feet. (Or 450 sq. ft. per person.) Not tiny. Still, there are just two bedrooms upstairs, so the Shosted's two boys share. And when company comes for dinner, it can get pretty crowded around the kitchen table.

In short, this house is homey. As Shelly cleans the kitchen or plants petunias, she often thinks about Erick's grandmother and how proud she was of this place. Shelly likes knowing that "she raised her two children in this house and now we are raising our two."

If the feel of the place is one reason for living small, mortgage payments are another. Says Christine Peterson about their town house in Orem, "We like the price. Obviously that is a big issue. It's why we are still here."

Peterson bought the 2,100-square-foot-home 10 years ago, when she was single. She had two roommates. They moved out when she got married. Then there were only two people in all that space and the town house seemed huge.

Now Peterson and her husband, Mark, have three children. (Their living space averages 425 square feet per person.) They will eventually buy a bigger home, she predicts. In the meantime she loves living in a place where someone else takes care of the lawn and where the front yard is not divided by driveways. In her neighborhood, the sidewalk is a safe place for children to play.

Her home may have gone from feeling big to feeling tiny, but actually the size of Peterson's house is probably average for homes being built in Utah these days.

According to the National Association of Home Builders, the average new U.S. home is 2,230 square feet. That size is holding steady after decades of increases. However, it can be tricky to compare the national average to the Utah average, says Mike Mineer, vice president of Construction Monitor, a company that tracks building permits and other trends.

Mineer explains the problem: Some counties include unfinished basements in their numbers and others report only the finished square footage. Mineer



Erick and Shelly Shosted enjoy the cozy feel of their snug home and neighborhood in Copperton.

*Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret Morning News*

knows that many new homes are starter homes, with unfinished basements that will soon be finished. So his data show the average new home in Utah is 1,994 square feet — but he knows that's low. Still, he says, he's sure Utah homes are smaller than the national average.

Mineer just came back from Denver where he saw starter homes that started at 2,600 square feet (selling for \$200,000). They were not as cute as Utah starters, he added. They were boxy.

If a starter home can feel boxy, a big home can sometimes feel too big, especially after the kids grow up.

After all, who wants to clean and heat a bunch of empty bedrooms? Not Mel and Carol Butler, who live in a 4,700-square-foot home that actually felt pretty cozy when all seven kids were around. (In those days, they had an average of 533 square feet per person.) The Butlers want a new home with the same size kitchen and living room, but without all those bedrooms and without a big family room in the basement.



Curtis, left, and Wyatt Shosted eat breakfast.

*Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret Morning News*

Butler is a real-estate agent. He's learned that not every client wants a smaller house after the kids are gone. Some want the biggest and fanciest place they can afford. Some do go smaller, perhaps to an elegant condo, which can cost more than their house did.

We must remember that humans are not all alike, notes architect Bee Losee, who lives with her husband and two children in a renovated Salt Lake bungalow. "We tend to see ourselves as similar, but if you look at the animal kingdom, we are as different as they," said Losee. "Some of us might be happy in a nest or a hive. Some of us might be happy in a cave. But some of us, for reasons I don't really understand, need something bigger."

As for architect Dave Brems, he's lived in a variety of spaces. A few years ago he was happy in a 1,600-square-foot home in Emigration Canyon. "It was energy efficient and easy to maintain," he says.

Currently, he and his wife and two children are happy in their 3,200-square-foot home. But they've also been happy, for weeks at a time, living on a 26-foot sailboat, sleeping head-to-foot and stuffing their possessions into every available nook.

The Brems recently bought 10 acres of land near Boulder, in Garfield County. It is a beautiful spot that adjoins thousands of acres of public land. It is just too pretty to mar with something big and man-made, Brems feels.

So the retreat he will build on this place will be small, with a big deck. Maybe it will be as large as 600 square feet, he says, but probably more like 400 square feet. Or smaller. Maybe the house will just have a kitchen and a bathroom, 100 square feet in all. Compared to living on a boat, he says, it will feel palatial.

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Curtis and Wyatt Shosted, along with their dad, Erick, play on the porch of their Copperton home. Porches used to be standard and now are making a comeback.

*Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret Morning News*

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